

PROJECT PROPOSAL

From: IDAHO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Subject: EQUITY IN SCHOOL SPENDING

Jurisdiction

By law, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) has established an advisory committee in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The committees are authorized to advise the Commission in writing of any knowledge or information they have of any alleged deprivation of voting rights and alleged discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice.

Background

Achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant.¹ As reported by the General Accountability Office, the Congress among others has been concerned about the academic achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. As economic disadvantage is related to race and ethnicity, and as economic disadvantage may be related to spending differences, minority children may not be afforded equal educational opportunity.

In Idaho, Latinos are the State's largest minority group, at 12 percent of the population. And that population is growing. From 2000 to 2010, the Latino population increased by 73 percent—or by more than 74,000 residents. With respect to the school-age population, 45 percent of Idaho's Latinos in 2010 were 19 or younger—compared to 28 percent for non-Latinos. As a result, the Latino student population in the state's public schools has almost doubled from 26,966 in 2003 to 45,805 in 2012.²

Nationwide, Latinos as a group have lower educational attainment rates compared to whites. For example, only 19 percent of Latino adults have a college degree, compared to 42 percent of whites. The gaps between attainment rates of Latino and white adults are particularly noticeable in states that have sizeable Latino populations.³

Similar to national trends, there remains a sizeable achievement gap between Latinos and whites in Idaho. In 2010, the gap between Latinos and white fourth grade students in reading proficiency was 17 percent.⁴ And according to a recently released report by the National Assessment of Education Progress, Latino students in Idaho averaged a score of 251 out of 500 in vocabulary in contrast to an average score of 263 for whites.⁵

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Assessment Program, *Achievement Gaps*.

² Idaho's Fast growing Hispanic population shows education gains at <http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/boise/2013/jan/18/idahos-fast-growing-hispanic-population>

³ National Conference of State Legislatures, Trends in Latino College Access and Success, at <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/educ/trendsinlatinosuccess.pdf>.

⁴ Table 1.

⁵ Victor Garcia, Fox News Latino, *Idaho Latino Students Make Strides with Vocabulary*, Jan. 11, 2013 at <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2013/01/11/idaho-latino-students-making-strides-with-vocabulary>.

Table 1: Grade 4 Reading Proficiency, Idaho--2010

	Starting Proficiency	Ending Proficiency
White	84	89
Latino	61	72
English Language Learners	51	60

Source: Idaho Advisory Committee from Department of Education data.

While Latino students' average scores have increased in recent years, closing the Latino-white achievement gap remains a challenge. Efforts to reduce the achievement gap and cut dropout rates have had some success, however. The Latino student dropout rate in the state has dropped measurably, from 8.2 percent in 2001 to just 1.7 percent in 2010. Idaho's work toward helping Latino students with reading skills and vocabulary has also paid off; as Latino students in the State test higher in those categories than Latinos in the rest of the country.⁶

Nevertheless in Idaho there exists an income disparity between Latino households and white households, and the disparity between poor students' performance and the performance of their non-poor peers is well documented. For example, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment, just 14 percent of fourth grade students who qualified for the free and reduced lunch program (a measure of poverty) performed at or above the proficient level compared to 41 percent of those students who did not qualify for the program.

This relationship between low household income and achievement in turn is likely related to race and ethnicity, as race and ethnicity are correlated with household income. In turn, the observed achievement gap between minority students and non-minority students may be connected to inequities in school financing. This is because school district spending is generally related to wealth and tax levels, and consequently school districts with low levels of wealth may have lower per-child spending than wealthier districts.

Efforts have been made to achieve greater spending equity. At the federal level, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). ESEA was enacted in 1965 as part of the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty campaign. The law's original goal, which remains today, was to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving poor students.⁷

Additionally, data collected by the U.S. Department of Education indicate that a substantial proportion of Latino students in grades 4 (37 percent) and 8 (21 percent) are English language learners. This fact—combined with the large percentage of fourth- and eighth-grade Latino students that are English language learners—may contribute to the achievement gap observed between Latino and white fourth- and eighth-graders.⁸

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ No Child Left Behind Act, Pub. L. 107-110.

⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Assessment Program, *Achievement Gaps* at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2011459.aspx>.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is for the Idaho Advisory Committee to examine equity in public education spending conditional on race and ethnicity. Of specific interest to the Idaho Advisory Committee is whether per-child spending by school districts with high percentages of low-income minority students is lower than spending on more-advantaged white children in Idaho.

Scope

The scope of the project is limited to an examination of per-child spending among public school districts in Idaho, excluding charter schools. The project also purposely excludes an examination of differences in school district revenues.

Methodology

Project Design

The Idaho Advisory Committee will engage in fact-finding activity to learn whether per-child educational spending in Idaho is provided equally regardless of race, ethnicity or national origin.⁹ The Chairman of the Idaho Advisory Committee will appoint a sub-Committee to work with regional staff in the conduct of the fact-finding.¹⁰

In examining the issue, the Committee acknowledges the concern that any school selection criteria for a school spending study may not be able to differentiate on the basis of race and ethnicity because of other factors. For example, if selection criteria deliberately select districts with particular characteristics, then the comparison may be one of the spending among only the selected districts with the selection characteristic. To address this concern, the Committee will include all public school districts in the state in its examination and will engage multivariate statistical techniques to isolate contributing factors such as poverty and geography.

Data Collection

From public data sources, the Committee will obtain student demographic information to include: (1) total enrollment, (2) race/ethnicity demographics of district children, (2) number of low-income children.

From public data sources, the Committee will obtain school district financial information to include: (1) total per child spending and (2) geo-identification of the district.¹¹

⁹ A fact-finding activity is the systematic gathering of data, documents, and opinions undertaken by a state advisory committee that enable its members to reach factual determinations and may involve independent research and analysis by the committee (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Administrative Instruction Manual, 5-7, Appendix 1.)

¹⁰ The sub-Committee will be balanced by political affiliation. (Federal Advisory Committee Act regulations and Commission Administrative Instructions require state advisory committee projects to be conducted in a balanced manner. SAC projects must seek to consider a variety of views, opinions and perspectives.)

¹¹ The U.S. Department of Education classifies school districts into one of four geo-identification categories: (1) urban, (2) suburb, (3) town, and (4) rural.

Analysis

The Idaho Advisory Committee through its administrative regional office will engage in quantitative analysis of the data to learn whether per child spending is conditional on race and ethnicity, controlling for district size, district geography, district poverty, and English proficiency.¹² Formally,

$$\$ = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \varepsilon$$

Where

\$ is per child spending by school district i

X_1 is the geo-identification of school district i

X_2 is district enrollment of school district i

X_3 is percentage of white students in school district i , and

X_4 is percentage of low-income students in school district i

The Idaho Advisory Committee will also extend its analysis to include a weighted analysis of per child spending, weighting district enrollment for poverty, ELL students, and students with IEPs.

The GAO among others has reported that children with special needs, specifically low-income students, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency may require additional educational resources to succeed at the level of their non-disadvantaged peers.

Anticipated Outcomes

In addressing the issue of equity in school spending, the Idaho Advisory Committee seeks to bring Commission and public attention to whether children in Idaho are being provided equal educational resources, regardless of race and ethnicity.

Timeframes

Action

1. Project Proposal approved by SAC and OSD
2. Data collection and analysis complete
3. Approval of report by Committee
4. Public release of report

Date

June 5, 2015
June 30, 2015
August 31, 2015
September 30, 2015

Budget

Non-Salary Estimated Costs:	\$0
* Meeting space	\$0
* Court reporter	\$0
* SAC Travel	\$0
* Staff Travel	\$0

¹² It is recognized that upon review of the data the proposed statistical methodology may have to be revised due to the underlying characteristics of the data, e.g., heteroskedasticity, non-linearity, non-normality of the error term.